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DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/AND, WHA/USOAS, DRL

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [CO](#)  
SUBJECT: GOC LAUNCHES PROGRAM OF COMMUNITY RAPPROCHEMENT IN  
URABA REGION

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood. Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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¶1. (C) On April 24-25, the new GOC Special Representative for Uraba and officials of several GOC ministries visited Apartado, Antioquia Department, to discuss economic development projects and delivery of social services with local officials and residents. The delegation traveled to the town center of San Jose de Apartado and held two town hall meetings. The visit is the third in a series that will continue as the GOC reaches out with special aid to areas in conflict with high numbers of displaced persons. End summary.

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Town Hall Meetings: The Silent Majority Speaks?  
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¶2. (U) Jaime Avendano, the new "Special Representative for Uraba" held town hall meetings with the Apartado mayor, Phidalo Banguero, in the municipal capital of Apartado and near the urban center of San Jose de Apartado on April 24 and ¶25. Avendano was accompanied by representatives of GOC ministries, PolOff, and two Embassy LES employees. Avendano opened the meetings by admitting that the GOC had in the past lost the trust of its people who suffered from the conflict or had been neglected. It was now time for hope, renewal and change. The tone of the meetings was positive and constructive. Residents in San Jose de Apartado greeted the delegation with flowers, coconut milk, fresh fruits and vegetables to eat. While the delegation was mostly listening, some members made immediate commitments for assistance.

¶3. (U) One speaker thanked Avendano and said he was glad rural development decisions were finally being made in Apartado and not in Bogota. Others said they were happy the national government was finally listening to the concerns of the average rural resident, not only those of the Peace Community of San Jose de Apartado. Finally, another speaker said the Peace Community should be reprimanded for refusing to open a dialogue with the GOC, whether they had been given special rights by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights or not. (The IACHR decision to require the GOC to implement "provisional measures" for protection of the Community is not widely understood.)

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That's Cacao, not Coca  
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¶4. (U) CCAI's permanent Apartado team, lead by Luis Mario Gaviria, asked invitees to come to the meetings prepared to discuss trade and development issues as well as health and social welfare. Two associations of residents prepared a statistical report about the economic needs of the area, explaining the major crops (cacao, bananas, yucca, corn, avocados and beans) and the needs for economic development.

¶5. (U) A number of speakers said they regretted that the cacao industry -- once a profitable, stable cash crop for the municipality -- had been uprooted as a result of displacement. Apartado at one time produced 1,600 tons of refined cacao a year, employing over 500,000 workers. Others said they couldn't get their avocado crops to market because of the high cost of gasoline, the low sale price of avocados (200 pesos, or US \$0.08 each) and crumbling roads awaiting repair. (The Department of Antioquia just closed bidding for a contract to repair the 12-kilometer main road into San Jose de Apartado. The contract is for 400 million pesos, or US \$170,000, for patch repairs.)

¶6. (U) Residents primarily expressed the need to obtain: housing, access to emergency and routine health services, food security, identification documents, reliable water and utilities service, trash collection, primary and secondary education for children and adults, apprenticeship training (which contributes to greater success applying for microlending), microlending credits, microenterprise counseling, and titles for land. Residents also said they wanted to make sure GOC assistance was sustainable, and that in the long-term the GOC would address the issue of concessions or land that had been abandoned where the former owners would not be returning. (Some 80,000 people have voluntarily registered as being displaced in Apartado municipality, and there is a moratorium on buying or selling houses in San Jose de Apartado to protect the displaced.)

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San Jose de Apartado Growing, Peace Community Shrinking  
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¶7. (U) Residents have been returning to the town center of San Jose de Apartado. After the massacre in February 2005, when 8 members of the community (of whom, three belonged to the Peace Community) were killed by as yet unidentified assailants, the town was virtually empty. But after the police returned to the town in March 2005, people began to return and now some 57 families (285 residents) live there. In March 2005 there were only 3 businesses operating, while today there are 27. On March 1, 2006, the community celebrated the annual Avocado Festival -- complete with beauty pageant and parade -- for the first time in 10 years, which residents said was an important symbol of community solidarity and return to normalcy.

¶8. (U) The Peace Community, on the other hand, has dwindled by 40 percent from an original 80 families to only 47 over the past year. During an internal CCAI meeting, Gaviria said he would continue to press members of the Peace Community formerly located in San Jose de Apartado town center (now displaced to a private farm called "La Holandita" nearby) to accept the services offered by the GOC. A number of Peace Community residents have returned to the town center to enroll their children in school. Both Gaviria and Avendano expressed frustration that leaders of the Peace Community had rejected invitations to meet them. They invited community members to attend the town hall meetings, however, and a few did.

¶9. (U) Some 111 children now attend classes in the town center of San Jose de Apartado from preschool through fifth grade for four hours a day. There are 25 adults studying

primary school classes on Saturdays as well, and residents are trying to gather the minimum 40 students required to conduct a GED class.

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Building Trust, Reestablishing Security a Slow Battle  
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¶10. (U) During the town hall meetings, Gaviria said he wanted to improve the image of the GOC with Apartado residents, especially children. He told a story where he asked a student in San Jose de Apartado, "How did Simon Bolivar die?" To which the student responded, "The Army killed him." (Bolivar died of tuberculosis.) Gaviria said he hoped that the 1,300 families in the San Jose de Apartado area (6,500 residents) would continue to support his work and that of the security forces trying to protect them.

¶11. (C) According to Major Cubides, local commander of the National Police, the number of police decreased from 355 in March 2005 (only 55 of which were in the town center on patrol) to 165 soldiers (with 45 on patrol) today. Likewise, Colonel Padilla, commander of the Voltigeros Battallion of the 17th Brigade, said that in March 2005 there were over 100 footsoldiers on patrol or conducting operations in the town center, while now only 30 remain.

¶12. (U) The police agreed to work with members of the Peace Community regarding the memorial that the Community had constructed in the town square. The Peace Community built the memorial in early 2005 to honor over 400 residents of the area whom they believed were killed in conflict. In May 2005, Community members began to break down the memorial using its components (small colored rocks) to create smaller monuments in the region. The structure that remained had many sharp edges, and according to Cubides three children who were climbing on it had been hurt, one requiring stitches. The police started to tear down the remaining structure to make it less dangerous, which the Peace Community protested on its website. Cubides agreed tearing down the monument could be perceived as insensitive, and said he'd work with the Peace Community in the future to find a mutually acceptable solution to the problem.

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Background: GOC Outreach  
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¶13. (U) In late January, the Prosecutor General, the Minister of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Director of ACCI and the Director of the Vice President's Program on Human Rights met to develop a strategy to bring social assistance to residents of the conflictive region of

the Gulf of Uraba, which includes the peace communities of Cacarica, Jiguamiando, Curvarado and San Jose de Apartado. The group decided to send two simultaneous delegations on February 15 to the peace communities in Cacarica and San Jose de Apartado, bringing health and social services.

¶14. (U) During the week of April 10, the group named Jaime Avendano to be the new "Special Representative for Uraba." Avendano is based in the Center for Coordination of Integral Action (CCAI), which falls under the Presidential Agency for Social Action and International Cooperation (ACCI). His office covers issues in 51 municipalities over 53,000 square miles, and 1.8 million people.

¶15. (U) Avendano's April 24-25 visit to Apartado, Antioquia Department, was to discuss productive projects and assistance programs. PolOff, a State Department LES Legal Analyst and a USAID LES Program Assistant accompanied the CCAI delegation, which included seconded members of the Ministries of Agriculture, Culture, Defense, Education, Foreign Affairs, Health, and Interior and Justice; the Family Welfare Institute, the National Apprenticeship Service, the Institute of Sports, the Institute for Rural and Economic Development, the National Police, and ACCI. Another CCAI visit is scheduled for mid-May.

WOOD